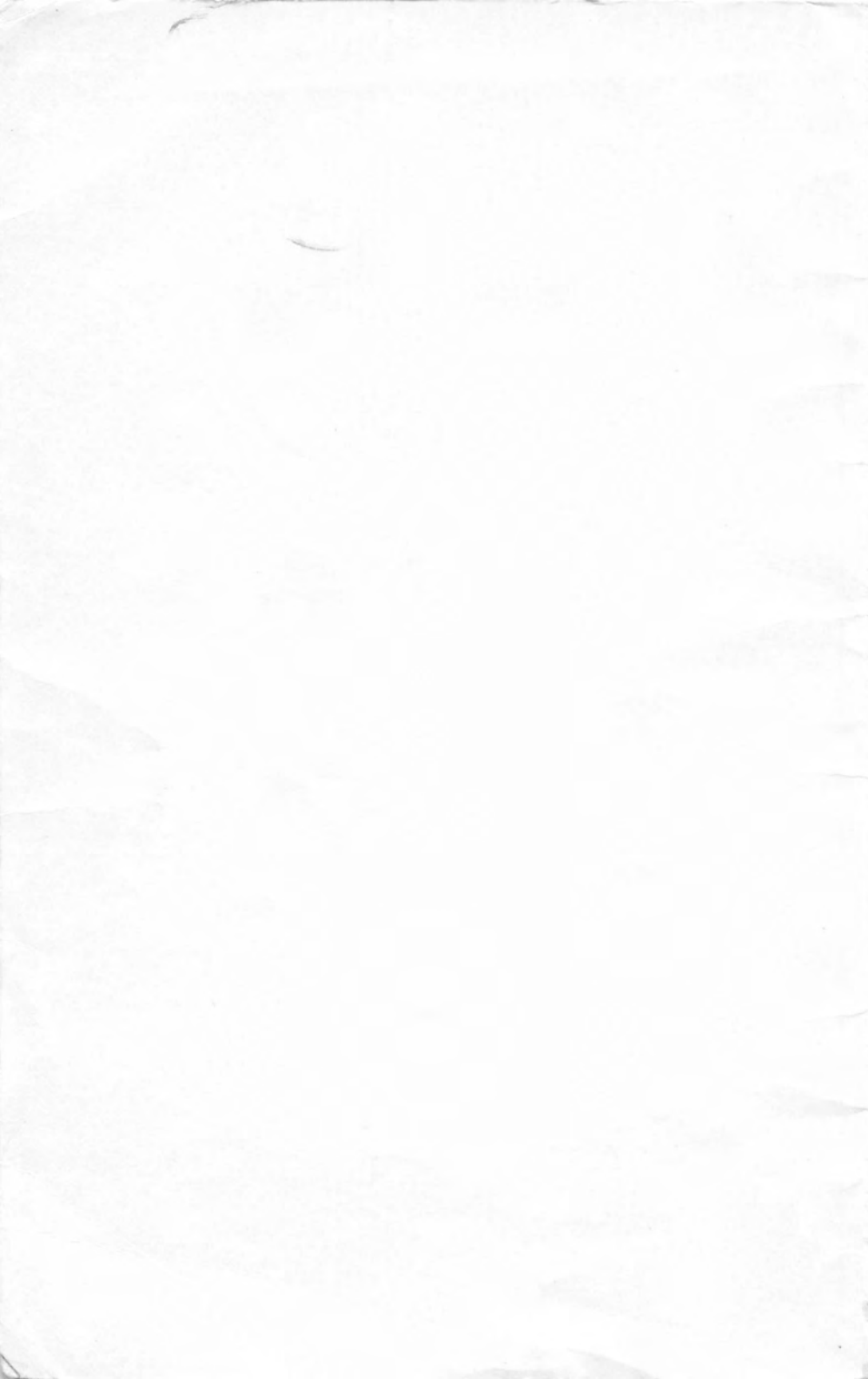




**WILLIAM
THE
REFRIGERATOR
PERRY**

**AND THE
MONSTERS
OF THE
MIDWAY**

**THE CHICAGO BEARS
D.J. ARNESON**



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D.J. ARNESON

MODERN PUBLISHING
A DIVISION OF UNISYSTEMS, INC.
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10022

PRINTED IN CANADA

Cover Photo by: WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

Cover and Interior Book Design by: LINDA KOSARIN

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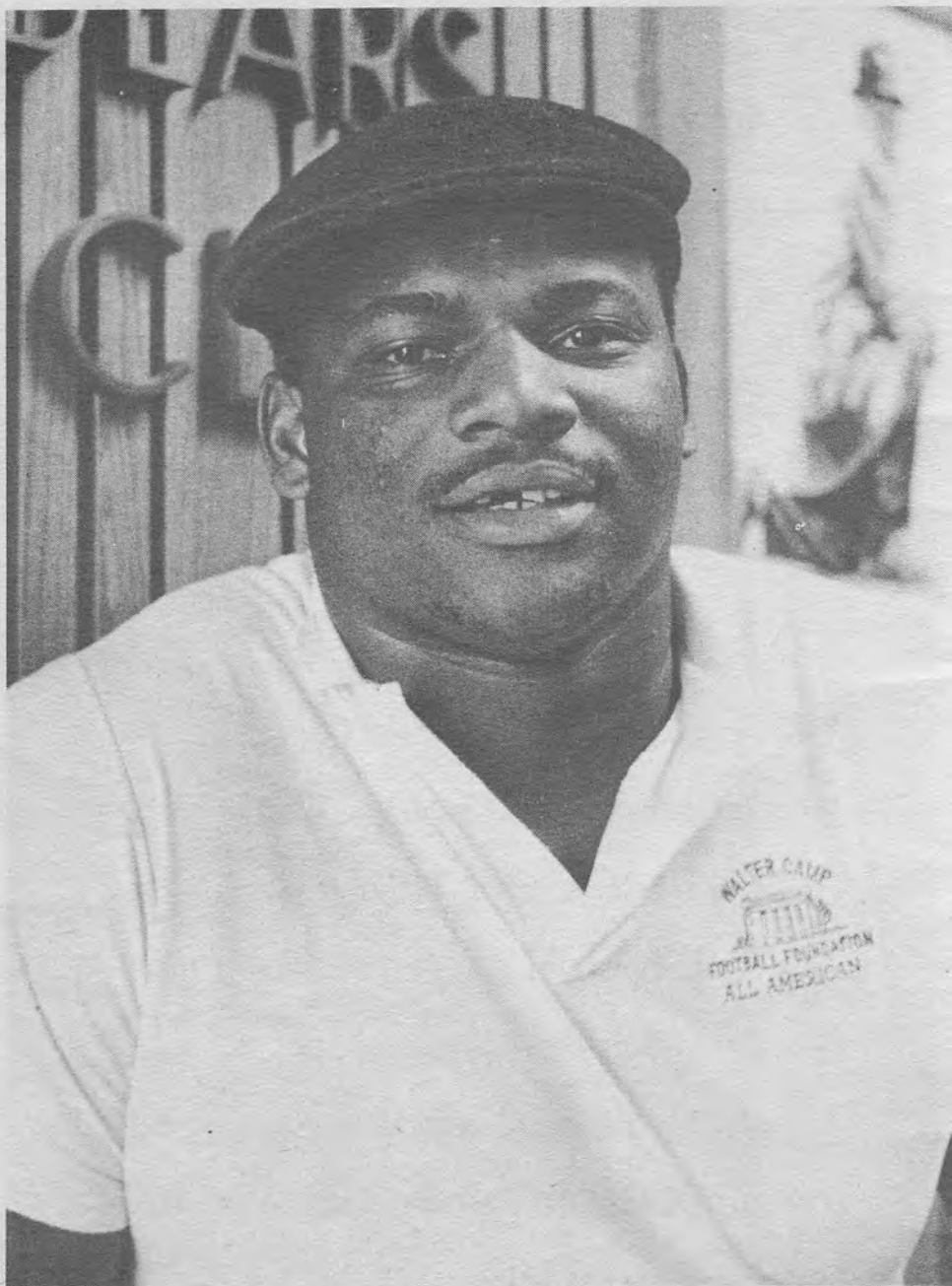
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Upon graduation from Clemson University, defensive lineman William Perry was selected as a first round choice by the Chicago Bears. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

CHAPTER I

THE SECRET WEAPON

Bears have better memories than elephants. Big bears have the best memories of all.

It was January. The breeze that always blows across Candlestick Park in San Francisco was cool, but not cold. Most of America was bundled up tight for winter. California is one of those lucky places where football fans don't freeze to death watching their favorite game.

The San Francisco 49ers' home stadium was nearly full. Almost everyone was a 49er fan. They were there to watch their team play the Chicago Bears in the National Football Conference championship. The winner would go on to the Superbowl. The loser would go home.

The Bears hadn't played in an NFC championship for over 20 years. Back in 1963, most of the

players now on the two teams were still kids. They were all grown men in 1985. Big men. *Very* big men.

The reason the Bears had reached the championship was their awesome defensive team. Nobody wins ball games without scoring, but a big part of football strategy is to keep the other side from scoring, against you. Sometimes it works.

It wasn't going to work for the Bears today.

The 49ers, led by their quarterback Joe Montana, number 16, walked all over the Bears' defense. They piled up score after score while the Bears, struggling to stay in the game, sat on the zero they started with.

Mike Ditka, the Bears' rugged head coach and a former Bear himself, turned red with frustration as the 49ers' lead got bigger. The time on the clock got smaller. The roaring crowd cheered for the home team as Chicago fans grew quiet. Everyone watching knew the Bears were beaten.

A rumble went through the crowd as Montana lined up his team for the next play. Something peculiar was happening on the field. Guy McIntyre, a 264-pound 49er guard, didn't go into the line as he was supposed to. He positioned himself in the backfield instead. As a guard his job was to be a human brick in the wall protecting the quarterback. Putting a huge man in the backfield is like positioning the shortest man on a basketball team under the net. Neither makes any sense.

Mike Ditka's frustration turned to humiliation as the surprise play produced a solid gain for the 49ers. When the same play was used again and the 49ers moved the ball closer to the goal line, Ditka was burning. The game ended 23 to zero. The Bears were forced into an early hibernation. The 49ers went on to win Superbowl XIX.

The 49ers called their new play the "Angus Play." It was a play Mike Ditka would not forget.

A NEW BALL GAME

It was football weather again. A brand-new season. The Giants and Bears and Rams and Vikings and 49ers and Patriots and all the other professional football teams across the country were at it once more. As October leaves drifted silently to earth, the *thud*, *bam*, and *crunch* of colliding human tanks echoed in stadiums from Boston to Los Angeles.

Last year's foes faced one another like gladiators in ancient arenas. Each team had a fresh chance to be the best. Superbowl XX was four months away. Between now and then, anything could happen.

Something did happen, and it changed the face of pro football like nothing had before.

The Bears squared off against the 49ers in Candlestick Park for their first meeting since the "Angus Play" game knocked them out of last year's play-offs. San Francisco's Superbowl win earned the 49ers top-dog honors. Injuries, a poor preseason record of one victory and three losses,

plus the memory of their crushing defeat by the 49ers made the Bears the underdogs.

Coach Ditka had his work cut out for him. Perhaps to soften the blow of another defeat, or maybe to put the 49ers on edge, Ditka praised the San Francisco team.

In return, the 49ers' coach spoke of how dangerous the Bears would be. Each coach was determined to make his opponent sound deadlier than Attila and his Huns.

"It was almost comical the way each coach was saying how wonderful the other team was and how they feared for their lives," 49er tackle Keith Fahnhorst said. He compared it to the boasting of professional wrestlers, but in reverse.

Jim McMahon, the Bears' maverick quarterback, was ready for Sunday's game. Knocked out of the Bears' lineup the year before by an injury in their game against the Oakland Raiders, McMahon hoped to spearhead his team's return from disgrace. With Walter Payton (the NFL's all-time leading rusher), wide receiver Willie Gault, linebacker Mike Singletary, and the rest of the Bears, McMahon and the Monsters of the Midway planted their feet in the turf of Candlestick Park determined to drive the 49ers into San Francisco Bay.

Just two and a half minutes after the opening kickoff and only six plays into the game, the Bears scored. A 73-yard drive of five passes and a 3-yard run into the end zone by Payton put a smile on Coach Ditka's normally tight lips. The Bears were back.

Fans of the 49ers were in shock. The score was 16 to zip by the early moments of the second quarter. A short-lived rally by San Francisco got them ten points by half time. That would be it for the rest of the day.

Mike Ditka began to sense that the game would be his. But it wasn't going to be enough just to win. The "Angus Play" treatment his Bears had received nine months earlier still smarted. Ditka had a plan to erase that memory and perhaps leave the 49ers with something they would never forget.

THE REFRIGERATOR PLAY

The Bears had the ball. Staring a loss in the face the 49ers' defense lined up hoping for a miracle. Fans who were more interested in avoiding the traffic jam after the game headed for the parking lot.

Those who missed the next two plays would be sorry they hurried home, because football history was about to be made. A new American hero was getting ready for his debut in this October Sunday game. The next minutes would reveal who he was.

Coach Ditka nodded. A mountain wearing a football helmet and the Chicago Bears' football jersey number 72 trotted into position. The man weighed 310 pounds. His normal place on the field was with the defensive unit as a tackle. A player that huge wasn't expected to play offense. Or even move. Just staying in place to plug the line was enough.

The giant 49er defense blinked hard when the biggest Bear they'd ever seen settled into a running stance in the backfield. He wasn't going to be in the line at all. Mike Ditka was playing a defensive tackle as a fullback!

But there was more. The crowd was wide-eyed and silent as McMahon called for the snap. The handoff went to number 72.

William Perry tucked the tiny ball into the safety of his huge arm as if it were a ripe melon and ran in the only direction he knew, straight ahead. He plowed through the 49er line like a tank through a hedge. He gained only two yards. One would have been enough. The "Refrigerator Play" was born. William Perry was on his way out of the obscurity of being "just a second-string guy from the defense," as *Sports Illustrated* magazine said, to a full-blown national hero.

LIGHTNING STRIKES

Pro football had been a sleeping giant for years. Fans had grown accustomed to the give and take of big men on the field stomping over one another. They were used to seeing light-fingered quarterbacks flip a football downfield to nimble-footed pass receivers. They had seen it all, over and over again.

The differences between players and teams were often small. True, there were superstars among them, players and teams alike. But professional football is a business as much as it is a sport. That made it *serious*.

What happened in Candlestick Park that day in October wasn't serious. It was *fun*! The fans who watched the very first "Refrigerator Play" weren't sure what they'd seen.

They'd be sure the next week on *Monday Night Football*. Mike Ditka, the Monsters of the Midway, and the new guy on the squad, William Perry, would be back with the next act. From then on, pro football would be fun again.

America was lighted from one end to the other by the soft glow of millions of television sets. They were tuned to the channel that carried the football action on Monday nights. The action focused on the Bears and their longtime rivals, the powerful Green Bay Packers. Much of football history had been made by these two teams. More would be made tonight.

Many football fans already knew about the famous "Refrigerator Play" against the 49ers. So when Perry came onto the field as an offensive player, the Packers weren't surprised. They put 224-pound defensive linebacker George Cumby in their lineup to stop him.

It didn't work. Perry overpowered Cumby "the way a corpuscle attacks a germ," as one sportswriter put it. The Refrigerator bored holes through the Packer line wide enough for running back Walter Payton to burst through for two touchdowns with room to spare.

The best was yet to come. The Bears lined up near the Packers' goal. The quarterback took the snap from center. He spun to hand off the ball. To

the delight of Chicago fans and the astonishment of the Packers, William Perry rumbled by. He put the ball against his belly and once again ran in the only direction he knows: straight ahead.

He burst through the Packer line and stepped into the end zone. It was the first time a defensive lineman had scored a touchdown off a set play. To celebrate, Perry fired the spike that was seen 'round the world. The whole country giggled as the heaviest man in football enjoyed a private thrill few linemen ever experience. The Refrigerator, the second-string player from the defense who had gone over to the offense, was on his way to winning America. Hardened fans who were used to seeing the machinelike NFL grind its way through the season like a fine watch ticks off the time started to smile.

Two weeks later, playing the Packers for the second time that season, the smile turned to good-natured laughter.

The first half went badly for the Bears. The Packers had scored a field goal for three points. The Bears were still at zero.

The clock was running down to end the first half. Any coach knows that to be behind at half time is dangerous. It makes the trailing team feel like they are losing. Mike Ditka knew that as well as any coach in the NFL.

The Bears were on the Packers' 4-yard line. It was the second down. They had three chances to move the ball over the goal. But the Packers weren't blocking dummies. They knew how to defend a goal line at short range.

Ditka gave the nod to The Refrigerator.

William Perry rose from the bench where, until now, he thought he'd be spending the rest of the season as an inactive player. The bench creaked with relief as the six-foot-two-inch, 310-pound giant stepped onto the field.

The Packers saw him coming. Their coach quickly changed his defensive lineup. He sent in the biggest men he had. You don't stop runaway trucks by waving your arms.

Perry positioned himself as if he were going to ram a hole through the Packers' meat-heavy line. But as quarterback Jim McMahon shouted signals to his Bears, Perry rose onto his feet and trotted into motion.

The Packers were stunned. Defensive linemen aren't supposed to play offense. And they certainly aren't supposed to go into motion. That's for the offensive backs, the men who carry the ball.

The instant the ball was snapped, Perry picked up speed. He faked a move straight ahead, then neatly stepped out of the way of a surprised Packer linebacker. The Refrigerator turned toward his quarterback in time to catch a timid little pass that settled softly into his huge hands like an injured bird. He was over the goal line. William Perry had just become the first defensive lineman in pro ball history to score a touchdown as a pass receiver.

"It was the first pass I had ever caught in any game," Perry said.

"I wanted Perry to be the only lineman ever

to run for a touchdown, catch a touchdown pass, and throw for a touchdown," Coach Ditka said later in the season. "Everybody roots for the underdog. Everybody can identify with a common, overweight guy."

Overweight? Yes. Common? Not by a South Carolina country mile.

The new kid wasn't finished yet. Using him was "the best use of fat since the invention of bacon," sports columnist Ray Sones of the *Chicago Sun-Times* said. Lightning had struck the NFL and all of pro football. The country came down with a happy case of "Fridge Fever."

CHAPTER II

"SOMETHING SPECIAL"

The football draft is the process professional teams use to pick new players. In 1961 the Chicago Bears picked a young, crew-cut college star from the University of Pittsburgh as their first choice. He was lean and mean. And he loved the game.

His name was Mike Ditka. He played on the Bears' championship team in 1963. It would be their last championship for a long time. It would be long enough for Ditka to become the Bears' head coach and long enough for another famous Bear first-round draft pick to make headlines.

It would be just long enough for William Perry to grow up. Way up.

William Perry was never a little kid. "I was big even when I was little," he says. The only thing small about Perry is his hometown.

Aiken, South Carolina, is a rural community of simple houses and ordinary people. It's the kind of place where lots of American heroes come from. Although there are fancy horse farms nearby, and the large city of Augusta, Georgia, is not far away, Aiken reflects its people.

The Perry family was already growing when William was born on December 16, 1962. There would be a dozen children in all, eight boys and four girls. But those weren't the numbers that made the Perrys extraordinary. It was the fact that the Perry kids were b-i-g. . .BIG!

William Perry's father, Hollie, was a house-painter. His mother, Inez, was a dietician and cook at Aiken Prep, a school not far from the Perry home. Both were sturdy, but neither was the giant one might expect of parents with over-size kids. Both were hard workers. They had to be in order to help their children reach the goal set by Mrs. Perry.

"The number one thing I wanted them to get was their high school diplomas," she said. Proudly she would add, "And all of them did. Practically all of them have been to college. You don't see that happen much with twelve kids."

The Perrys lived in housing projects for many years. But Hollie Perry's dream for his family was a home of their own. It came true when they moved into a comfortable, three-bedroom house on Kershaw Street. Though it was crowded at times, it was the center of a family that loved and cared for one another, and for others.

"I wouldn't stand a bad child," Inez Perry said. "I wanted everyone to like them and for them to be nice people. They knew I didn't like fighting or people to mistreat each other."

The example set by Mrs. Perry earned her children a fine reputation. "They were all nice kids," Aiken football coach Gary Smallen said. "And very well respected."

Two things became important in the Perry kids' lives. Sports. And eating.

The house was across the street from a recreation center. Pickup games of basketball and other games were available at any time. That took care of the sports.

Mrs. Perry's kitchen took care of the rest. "I never put a limit on what they could eat," she said. "I like to cook and he liked to eat," she added, speaking of William. "If dinner wasn't ready, William would take himself into the kitchen and make a cake. He just loved making cakes. Chocolate, plain, strawberry, whatever. He would share, but I don't know whether he shared a lot."

William Perry was never smaller than 13½ pounds. That's how much he weighed when he was born. By the time he was in the ninth grade he weighed 240 pounds. His mother remembers how concerned she was. "I was afraid he would hurt somebody," she said. "William just grew and grew. When he was around ten or twelve, he looked like he was a person sixteen or seventeen years old."

The Refrigerator has never weighed less than 300 pounds since graduating from high school. It wasn't always easy being so big. Like any kid who stands out from the rest, Perry took his share of teasing. But rather than being ashamed or angry, he took it in stride. "I was born to be big," he said, "and I ain't disappointing nobody."

It was natural for a boy Perry's size to think about football. There was a Peewee Football League in Aiken. But it cost money to suit up a boy for the league. The Perrys weren't poor, but they were unable to afford such a luxury.

East Aiken school principal T. W. Williams knew the value of sports. He also recognized a deserving boy when he saw one. Little did the good-hearted school man know he was creating a future "Monster" when he arranged for William Perry's Peewee football career.

"We had no money for me to play," Perry said. "So Mr. Williams let me cut the grass at the school, and he paid for my Peewee football. That's how I got my start."

By the time William Perry reached high school, he was a serious football player. He was also a serious threat not only to his opponents, but sometimes to his teammates as well.

"I think he made more kids quit the team than come out," Perry's high school football coach Eddie Buck said. "In one-on-one drills, a lot of times guys would quit, instead of going against him."

It was no wonder. Perry was huge. By his senior year his thighs were 32½ inches around. That's thicker than many boys' waists. He was so big that when it came time to have team pictures taken, Perry couldn't get into his old football pants. They were simply too small.

Coach Buck described how the problem was solved.

"The seamstress had to cut apart another pair of game pants and sew the two pants together," he said. "I still have them as a souvenir."

Perry was a good player and a good student. He worked hard at both. At the time of his graduation he hadn't missed a day of practice or a game because of injury, and only one day of school. And that was because of an ice storm. "It didn't matter if I was sick," he said about the sport he loved. "I still put on my pants, regardless."

William Perry knew he wanted to be a football player for a long time. "It had been my goal ever since the fifth or sixth grade," he said. "Some people came up to me and said, 'Do you know you can make money doing what you like?' I said, 'No, I didn't know that.' They said, 'Those guys on TV playing pro ball, they get paid for that stuff.' I said, 'I'm gonna pursue that.' "

Pursue it he did. But first, there was college.

CHAPTER III

THE BIGGEST TIGER

Clemson University is in Clemson, South Carolina. It's a friendly school. There's a family-like feeling on campus some say is as southern as pecan pie. It has outstanding athletic teams. It's not very far from home for most of the students who attend. It was the perfect school for William Perry.

Perry's high school athletic career had not gone unnoticed. Players of his exceptional ability often have their pick of colleges. His size certainly caught everyone's attention. But it was his talent that held it. People are amazed to learn that the gentle giant of professional football averaged 18 points per game playing high school *basketball*. *And* that he can slam-dunk a basketball. *And* run the 100-yard dash in under 11½ seconds.

When college coaches heard about William

Perry, they wanted him. Auburn, Ohio State, Michigan, Michigan State, the University of Tennessee, and UCLA all had hoped he would pick their school. They hoped in vain. Perry's big decision to choose Clemson was for a small reason.

The small reason was Sherry Broadwater. She was Perry's girl friend. They had gone together since the summer between the ninth and tenth grades in high school. "At the end of the tenth grade we started getting serious," Perry said. "We've been going together ever since."

On one of their first dates huge William asked little Sherry to dance. She said no. He was just too big, she thought. But eventually she changed her mind. "I stopped thinking of William as big," Sherry says now. "I just started thinking of him as muscle-built."

He was muscle-built, all right. But not muscle-headed. Perry knew what he wanted, and that was to be close to Sherry. He decided to be a Clemson Tiger because Clemson was only a two-hour drive from Aiken.

Perry's athletic ability always amazed his coaches. He could run, throw, catch, kick, tackle, and block better than most of the team specialists. He was not a freak at all, but a player of remarkable talent.

As a hint of what would come four years later when the "Refrigerator Play" was sprung on the startled 49ers, Perry's defensive coordinator at Clemson suggested that the huge freshman would make an excellent offensive player. "He just about

kicked the air out of the ball," coach Tom Harper said of Perry's kicking style.

Clemson University was delighted with its huge Tiger. He wore a size 61 sports jacket, shirts that were triple extra large, pants with a 48-inch waist, and a finger ring that a baby could wear as a bracelet. Even his teammates were impressed by his size. One, Ray Brown, met Perry for the first time while waiting for an elevator. When the doors glided open, Brown found himself looking at a freshman as big as a you-know-what.

"You're as big as a refrigerator!" Brown exclaimed. "I'm going to call you G.E."

William Perry became "G.E." for short, but not for long. His huge appetite was a legend at home. It didn't take many midnight raids on the refrigerator at college to expand the legend. The refrigerator, the kind you plug in and fill with good things to eat, and William Perry, whom you just fill with good things to eat, became synonymous. A press release put out by Clemson's sports information director Bob Bradley made it official. It said: "William Perry, Clemson's mammoth freshman nose guard from Aiken, has picked up a new nickname from his teammates. He's called 'G.E.' because of his resemblance to a refrigerator in size."

Teasing was still a test Perry had to endure. When he was young, an accident with an air rifle had put out one of his front teeth. Everyone knew about the gap in his smile because he smiled so easily. Now it's his trademark. At Clemson it was

just one more thing to kid him about. "If he fills that space with a false tooth, how will we know if the light inside goes out?" was the type of joke the good-natured young player put up with. But like all the fun that has been made at his expense, he shrugs it off.

Jokes about his size weren't all people were hearing about William Perry. His performance on the football field was growing too. During his freshman year as a defensive lineman, Perry alternated with a 250-pound sophomore named William Devane. Together they were nicknamed "The Bruise Brothers." The two were controlling the line of scrimmage by the end of the 1981 season. That was the year Clemson had an unbeaten record of 11 wins. The team was the only undefeated college team in the country. It was ranked number one. On New Year's Day, 1982, the Tigers won their first national football championship in their history by beating Nebraska 22 to 15 in the Orange Bowl.

Though Perry played only half the time, switching with teammate Devane, he was becoming a nationally known figure. He was named Rookie of the Week and was mentioned in *Sports Illustrated* magazine after an exceptional performance against North Carolina. Perry had made five solid tackles and two quarterback sacks. "I think that was the game I established myself," he said.

At the end of his first year as a college football player, William Perry was named to the first

team of the freshman All-American squad by *Football News*. Attention like that was as sure to reach the eyes and ears of professional football scouts just as his selection to *Parade* magazine's All-American Prep team when he was in high school caught the eye of college scouts. But he still had three years of college to go.

Perry told Sherry he picked Clemson to be near her. "If I go way up to Michigan, I'll never get to see you," he said. He was as good as his word, and his word is as good as gold. He drove the two-hour trip to Aiken every chance he could. He even arranged his class schedule in order to have Thursday free so he could go to Aiken. When it was impossible to make the drive, he called her on the telephone. Calling every night was expensive. The only thing that stopped him was when he ran out of money. One month his telephone bill was \$600.

The year wasn't as hard on Sherry as it was for William Perry because she was near her family. There had to be a better solution, Perry thought. And there was. That summer Sherry Broadwater and William Perry got married.

Fall, football, and William Perry returned to Clemson. During the next three years the "G.E." legend would grow until it was as big as Perry himself. Never under 300 pounds, he once soared to a whopping 385.

Coaches were as impressed by his pure athletic ability as they were by his size. One said Perry could weigh 500 pounds and still look ordi-

nary because of his bone and muscle structure. Another, Penn State's Joe Paterno, was so impressed by the Clemson lineman's style that he said, "Perry would be a force even if he weighed two hundred pounds." There was "undoubtedly something in the Perry genes," another was quoted.

Whatever it was Perry had it. And the record grew to show that.

By the end of the 1982-1983 season, Clemson was ranked number eight by the Associated Press. The team racked up nine wins, one loss (against Georgia), and one tie (against Doug Flutie's Boston College).

That same year William Perry racked up one Associated Press First Team selection, one United Press International All-American First Team selection, and one Walter Camp All-American First Team selection.

When Perry finished his junior year, Clemson had the best Division I school record in the nation: 30 wins, 2 ties, and only 2 losses.

Perry's best year was 1984. When the two-time All-American's remarkable college career ended, it included the longest punt return by a Clemson player. He was the school's all-time leader at "rumble involvement," the name for breaking up an opponent's backfield. His "rumbling" caused or recovered 15 fumbles and 27 tackles for a loss. He broke the conference record with 25 quarterback sacks.

The pro teams were definitely looking hard at William "G.E." Perry.

"G.E." was the pride of Clemson University. Only once before had a Clemson player been unanimously nominated for All-American status. To make sure that it would happen to William Perry, the school's sports information office devised a plan. They would send pictures of Perry to important sportswriters and others around the country. That wasn't an original idea, but the kind of picture they decided to send was very special.

Since Perry's comparison to a refrigerator was well known at Clemson, the sports office decided to pose him with a refrigerator. A poster was made. From that photograph the legend of William "The Refrigerator" Perry was born.

The poster is now a valuable collector's item. There were only 4000 printed at a cost of \$10,000. Two thousand were sent to the sports media—radio, TV, magazines, and newspapers. The rest, 2000 posters, were sold in only a day and a half at \$5 each.

The poster shows Perry, his number 66 football jersey bulging around the middle, standing in front of a family-size refrigerator. On one side, a ruler made of tiger stripes measures his height. The other side says: Clemson's William "The Refrigerator" Perry measures up as an Outland Trophy & Lombardi Award Candidate.

"G.E." Perry became "The Refrigerator" because the refrigerator in the poster was not a General Electric model. The rest is football history.

CHAPTER IV

THE DRAFT

William Perry was already in the college football record books. But professional football is another ball game. Could a huge player that many experts thought was *too* big make it to the pros?

Perry knew he was being considered by a number of teams. Which team would take him, if any, was the big question.

In 1936 professional football adopted the Draft Rule. It is a system that assures that football players who are graduating from college are distributed fairly among professional teams. The object is to avoid letting one team get all the best players. By giving each team a close to equal chance to win, team play and coaching become as important as who is playing.

In the first round of the NFL draft, the Chicago Bears were looking for defensive line help. But nobody knew who or what kind of help they needed. The Bears' 1984 league record of 72 sacks looked pretty good. And they were the league's number one defensive team.

The Bears had heard about Perry, the "Refrigerator" character from Clemson. But they weren't convinced he was their man.

In the first place, William Perry was over 60 pounds heavier than the average linemen being chosen that year. Linemen are already big men. Those additional 60 pounds meant Perry was immense. When he played in the Hula Bowl in Hawaii at the end of his college career, Perry was called "absolutely the biggest player we've ever had."

The Bears' management and coaching staffs couldn't agree if Perry would be a good pick or not. Even the coaches disagreed with one another. The problem was Perry's size.

Any player, no matter how excellent his condition, has a critical mass, a weight that is more than he can carry and still play ball.

Nobody knew how big William Perry could get before he became too big—too fat—to play football. The Bears didn't want to take the chance that they might end up with a beached whale.

Mike Ditka was looking at some other risks. But they were risks that favored picking Perry.

Early in 1985, Ditka's scouts had looked closely at the kid from Clemson who could hide a

refrigerator just by standing in front of it. They reported to Ditka, telling him that Perry weighed 358 pounds and could run the 40-yard dash in 5.36 seconds. His college career statistics were already on record.

"I hate to think of him going somewhere else," Ditka said. As the chief architect of the Bears' strategy and tactics, the coach knew how hard it would be to play against a mountain with runner's legs. Since his players would have trouble going around him or over him, and it would be impossible to go through him, Ditka decided the Bears would be better off playing behind him. He wanted William Perry for his defensive line.

Perry was home in Aiken when he got the news that the Bears had picked him in the first round. "The noise just about blew the roof off when we heard I was picked," he said. That afternoon he was on his way to Chicago to become a Bear.

The jokes began to fly once again when the news broke that William Perry had been picked by the Bears. They all referred to his size. "Maybe the postmaster will give Perry his own Zip Code," was what one insensitive sportswriter said about this very sensitive young man. There were others.

Some comments were just plain unkind. Even some of the Bears' coaching staff expressed their doubts about their new 317-pound rookie. One defensive coordinator Buddy Ryan, would later say that Perry was just "an overweight and

disappointing rookie” and “a wasted draft choice and a waste of money.”

But at his first press conference as a Bear, before anybody knew how much money Perry would get paid, or if he were a bad choice or not, Coach Ditka spoke proudly of the smiling 22-year-old football wonder. Glancing at a brand-new dark blue Bears' football jersey with a fresh number 72 and the name Perry on it, he said, “He'll look good in that uniform, or two uniforms, whatever we put on him.”

The days of sewing two football pants together to suit up William Perry were over. He was already famous. Now came the hard part, proving himself a Bear.

CHAPTER V

THE BEARS

The Chicago Bears football team is 66 years old. They started as a team called the Decatur Staleys. In 1920 the Staleys and a dozen other football teams joined together to form the American Professional Football Association.

The Staleys moved to Chicago and their name was changed to the Chicago Bears. The American Professional Football Association became the National Football League. The Bears and the NFL have been together ever since.

Another name linked with the Bears and the NFL for most of their history is George Halas. Halas represented the Staleys when it joined the American Professional Football Association. He was the man who moved the team to Chicago. He changed the name to the Bears. Shortly before he

died in 1983, George Halas hired Mike Ditka as head coach. George Halas *was* the Chicago Bears for more than 60 years. He was a player, a coach, and an owner.

In the early days, professional football players earned a “whopping” \$1900 a season. At that time there were only 13 teams, so to play each team once during the season meant a player was paid a little over \$150 a game.

George Halas changed that. The days of the poorly paid professional football player were over when he signed up a player named Red Grange for \$100,000.

Grange won fame as a Bear and became one of the sport’s all-time greats. Other Bears followed Grange, whose nickname, “The Galloping Ghost,” was a household word in his day just as “The Galloping Roast”—William Perry—is today.

All-American fullback and tackle Bronco Nagurski plowed enough opponents out of the way of running back Beattie Feathers to make it possible for Feathers to gain 1,000 yards, an NFL first. Both were Bears.

Football Hall of Famer Sid Luckman, also a Bear, once passed for 400 yards in a single game.

And many years later a young player named Mike Ditka broke an NFL record for the Bears by catching 75 passes.

It wasn’t only Halas’s players who made football history. He is credited with coming up with the man-in-motion T-formation, filming football games for later study, forming team bands, and

having games broadcast play by play over the radio. A well-known sports magazine says that Halas "invented professional football." It is hard to dispute.

There is no disputing that Halas created the Bears in his image of what a pro football team should be. As proof, there are over 14 former Bears in football's Hall of Fame. Many Bears were selected for All-Pro teams. And the Bears won their share of championships.

Through much of their history, the Bears have been a team to be taken seriously. And they were serious about the game of football. Sometimes they were too serious. A well-known sports-writer said, "The Bears once had the most Neanderthal methods in the game." It's hard to imagine a team made up of cave men, but that is the kind of reputation they had.

The Bears had the reputation of being a team made up of individualists. The Bears' current president, Mike McCaskey, said, "Pro football is one of the last refuges in America for eccentrics." A glance at the nicknames of a few of today's Bears says he may be right. Besides "The Fridge," there are "Danimal," "Mongo," "Sweetness," "Spaceman from Planet X," "Super Yuppie," "Samurai," "Iron Mike," and others. Some call the team the "Bizarre Bears."

"Papa Bear" was what generations of Bears' fans and players called George Halas. He had been mean and ornery as an end when he played football, and he carried his style over to running

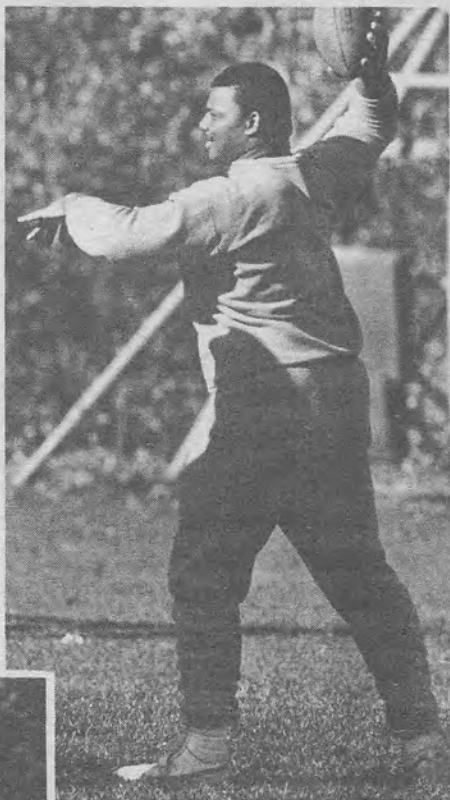


Proud parents Inez and Hollie Perry flip through their son's overflowing scrapbook in the family's Aiken, S.C. home. (UPI/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS)

Happy father William Perry, plays with the tiny fingers of his newborn daughter, Norie, held by his wife, Sherry. (UPI/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS)



The more than 300-pound defensive lineman for the Chicago Bears shows his passing form during a practice session.
(UPI/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS)



"The Refrigerator" is always ready to lend a hand as he helps teammate, quarterback Jim McMahon to his feet during a workout session.
(UPI/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS)



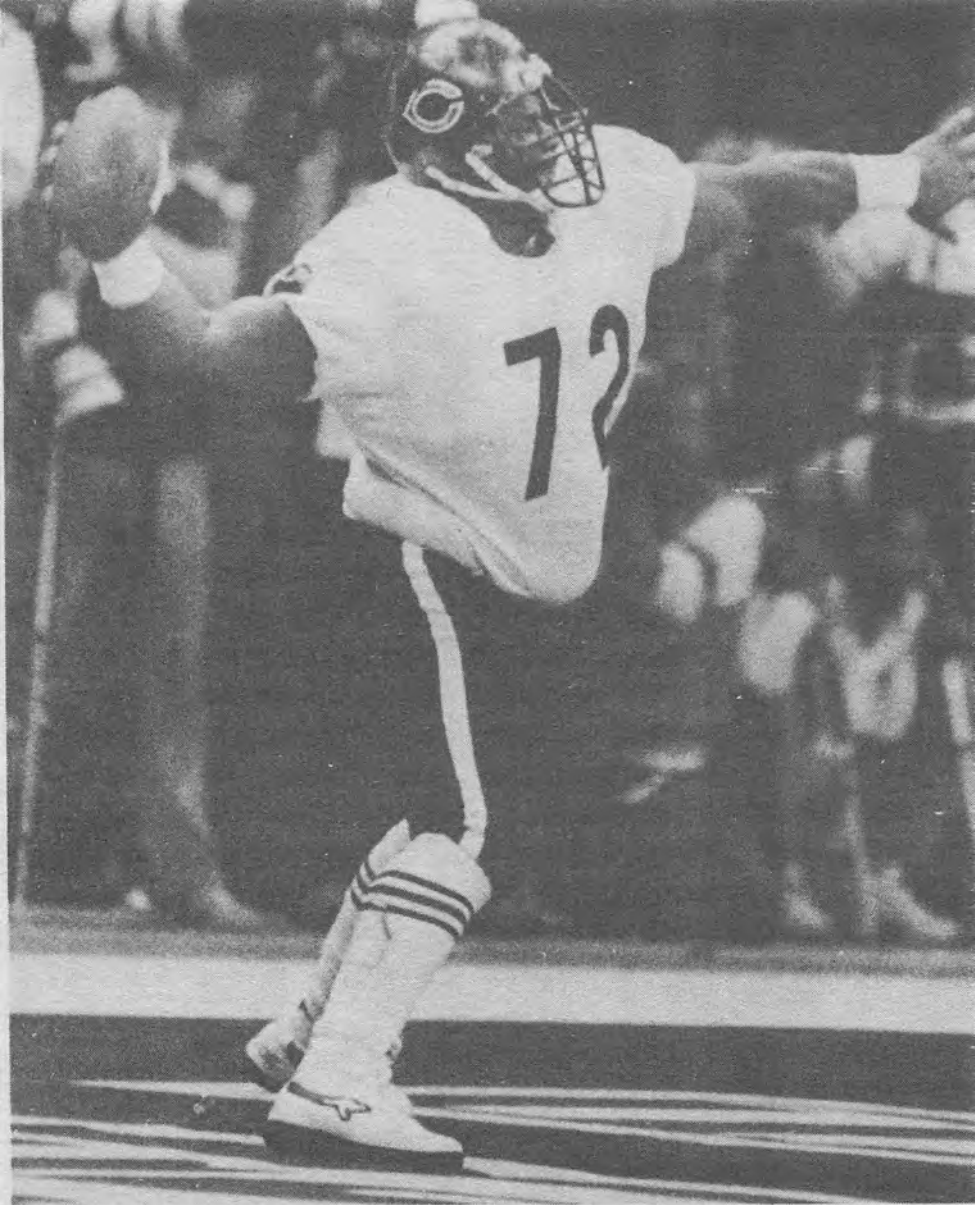
William Perry gestures as teammate Walter Payton belts out a song during the videotaping of "Rappin' Together" which includes excerpts of the Bears' Superbowl victory.
(UPI/ BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS)



During a guest appearance on the Bob Hope Christmas Show in December 1985, Perry and Hope share a laugh together. (UPI/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS)

An adoring fan receives an autograph from William "The Refrigerator" Perry. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)





William "The Refrigerator" Perry spikes the ball after scoring a touchdown in Superbowl XX. The Bears won 46-10 and scored the most points in Superbowl history. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

Teammates Jim McMahon (left) and Walter Payton sport headbands with messages at Superbowl XX. McMahon's supports the Juvenile Diabetes Fund and Payton's says that he loves the world. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)



Chicago Bears' coach Mike Ditka reacts on the sidelines as he watches his team play in Superbowl XX. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)



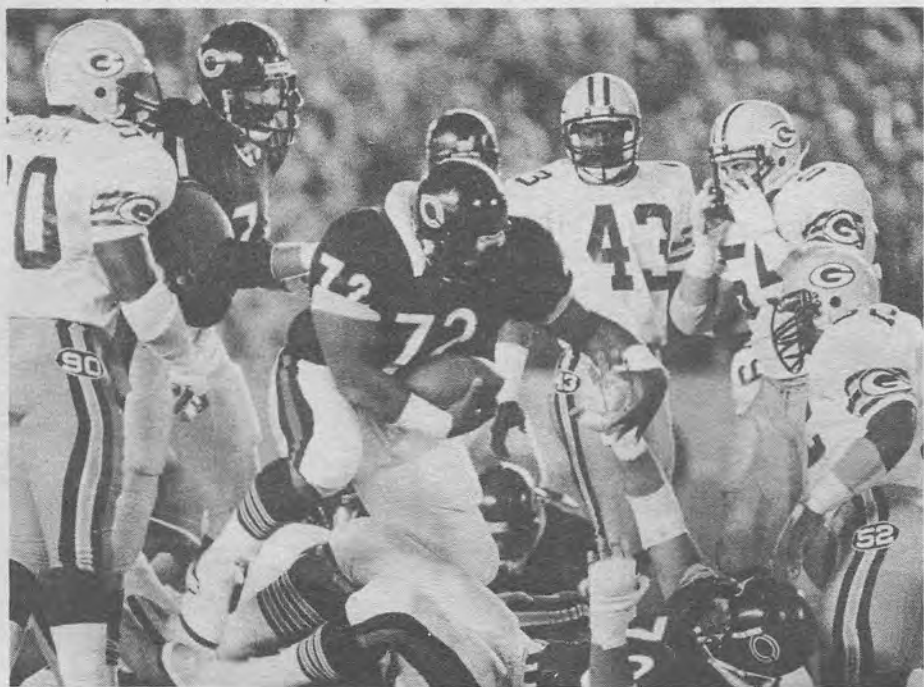
Chicago Bears' coach Mike Ditka is triumphantly carried off the field by "The Refrigerator" (right) and Steve McMichael after the Bears won Superbowl XX in New Orleans. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)





William "The Refrigerator" Perry (72) carries the ball into the endzone ahead of Green Bay's George Cumby (52) during second quarter action in a game against Chicago's biggest rival, the Green Bay Packers. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

"The Refrigerator" jumps to his feet after scoring a touchdown against the Green Bay Packers. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)





Chicago Bear (72) works out with teammates at a pre-season minicamp in Lake Forest, Illinois. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

An excited Perry meets Mr. T as he is welcomed to the set of the A-Team where he made a guest appearance. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)



the team. But when he was 73 years old he was forced to retire because of an arthritic hip condition. The Bears were turned over to his son "Mugs."

Sadly, "Mugs" Halas died of a heart attack at the age of 54. His father was then 85. As a reflection of the old man's remarkable spirit, George Halas took over the Bears once again. He continued to run his ball club as he had in the past. Those were the days when people said he had a trainer who decided how serious an ankle injury was by kicking the player's ankle.

To make certain the Bears would always be Bears, Halas scouted around for a new coach. He found a man who had played on the Bears' last championship team in 1963. He was a fierce player who'd been a tight end, a defensive end, a middle linebacker, and a punter in college. The man in charge of drafting players for the Bears at the time, George Allen, had this to say about his selection: "I thought he would make a perfect tight end, and I was right. Almost from the start he was better than others at the position. He was an excellent blocker. He seldom missed. He was an excellent receiver. He seldom missed. He was big and very strong and extremely difficult to bring down. He broke tackles and ran over people."

Sound like a Bear? You bet he was. The player Allen had drafted, and 20 years later Halas appointed head coach, was Mike Ditka.

CHAPTER VI

MIKE DITKA

Ditka wasn't a popular choice to head up the Bears. For fans who had no opinion, a Chicago newspaper headline gave them one. "Hiring Ditka Would Be Madness," it said.

It was well known that Ditka had a temper. He played to win and only to win. Anything else was unacceptable. To win he had to have a winning team. He felt that the team he took over didn't fill the bill. The result was a house-cleaning that shook up the Bears. "Did he sweep house?" Dan "Danimal" Hampton asked. "Let's just say if Mike had used a vacuum cleaner, he would have needed an extra bag."

For years Ditka's trademark was to be wildly emotional. When he was a player, he'd let teammates know if they weren't up to his standards of

play. As a coach he followed the same rule. About himself he admitted, "I have one physical problem. A big mouth."

Ditka came from the mill town of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. It's a small place tucked into the end of a valley that snakes its way to the Ohio River. Small shops and stores border Main Street. On the banks of the river is a massive steel mill.

There wasn't much opportunity for a young man growing up in a place dominated by steel-making. Fathers and sons and the sons of sons often ended up tending the furnaces or running the machinery that glowed and clanked and banged 24 hours a day, every day. Mike Ditka's big chance to change his future was his ability to play football.

The ability was not handed to him on a platter. He went out for the Aliquippa High School team when he was a sophomore. The coaches took one look at the scrawny, 135-pound kid and chased him off the field so he wouldn't get hurt.

That only made his determination to be a football player stronger. He began a training program to build up his body. His push-ups were so violent the house rocked, according to Mike Ditka's father. By the time Ditka was through, he was good enough to play college football at the University of Pittsburgh.

Ditka was a star at college. Later he was a star with the Bears, starting with his first year when he was named Rookie of the Year. But being a star player doesn't always mean a person would

be a great coach. Even as a player he admits he wasn't the best.

"I wasn't always the best," he said. "But nobody worked harder. One on one. You and me. Let's see who is tougher. I lived for competition. Everything in my life was based on beating the other guy."

His philosophy of working harder sometimes took its toll. In college he once knocked himself out throwing a block at a blocking dummy. He was so rough and hard in practice games, his coaches sometimes wouldn't let him play.

His career as a Bear player didn't end on a happy note. In 1967 George Halas sent the one-time first-draft pick to the Philadelphia Eagles. That year the Eagles had a perfect record: ten losses and no wins.

All was forgiven by the time Halas hired Ditka as head coach. But a lot had happened in between.

Mike Ditka's career as a professional football player was in a slide when he went to the Eagles. Some felt it was over. He was called a "washed-up relic" when he got a second chance to prove how good he really was.

Tom Landry, the unsmiling coach of the Dallas Cowboys, gave Ditka that chance. Although Ditka had trouble making it downfield, his intense sense of competition and the desire to be the best refused to let him admit he was through.

Mike Ditka worked on his legs and body until he was in the best physical shape of his whole

career. His performance on the field showed it. That year the Cowboys won the Superbowl.

For the next 13 years Ditka stayed with the Cowboys, first as a player, and then as a coach. He was tough in either job. When he was upset with officials, he let them know it. His temper flared at his players as well. He threw clipboards and kicked furniture when he was upset. When he was *really* angry he punched lockers with his fist.

Ditka's tantrums and philosophy didn't win him any medals from the players who knew him. A sports magazine asked 200 NFL players which coach they would *least* like to play for. Mike Ditka tied for second behind his own former boss Tom Landry. How did he take such a backhanded compliment? "Flattered," he said. It is not Ditka's style to hand out roses, and he doesn't expect to receive them, either.

"I want to win," he says. "That's the only thing I want to do. If a player wants to win, he should have no problem. If he wants to be patted on the head every time he does something wrong, then he'll have a problem."

Tom Landry recognized the value in Mike Ditka's playing and coaching philosophy. "Mike is a blend of the Lombardi simplicity and the multiple defense where coaching is today. He was always a believer in giving a player a job and letting him get it done."

There's little doubt that it was this attitude that let Mike Ditka give the nod to William Perry's first-round draft selection. Ditka gave "The

Fridge" a chance to show the doubters just what kind of an excellent player and athlete he is.

The Bears were having a poor season in 1981. George Halas, nearing the end of his incredible career, knew his beloved team needed new coaching blood.

Mike Ditka wrote Halas a letter. He told the crusty old "Papa Bear" why he was Halas's best choice to take over the team. Halas was convinced. He fired the coach whose final season record was a dismal six wins to ten losses, and he hired the man he had sent to the Philadelphia Eagles 14 years earlier.

A well-known slogan among the Chicago Bears is "Once a Bear, always a Bear." Mike Ditka was where he belonged. Called "Iron Mike" by some players and fans, his pride for his team was never as clear as when he spoke of his most cherished accomplishment in 25 years of football.

"I am proudest of being a Bear."

CHAPTER VII

BECOMING A BEAR

William Perry had a lot of Bear history to live up to. His selection as a Bear caught a lot of people by surprise. Some were downright angry. Many people weren't sure if it was a good idea to hire a player whose weight could go up or down by 60 or more pounds. The Bears were in the football business, not the grocery business!

The Bears knew at the beginning that Perry's weight would be the key factor to his success as a player. (One sportswriter quipped that when Perry "waddled into training camp . . . he looked less like a lineman than a tub of linguini.") "The Fridge" had always had the run of the refrigerator at home. He acknowledges his gargantuan appetite, sometimes with a smile. So do his brothers and sisters. When Perry and his younger brother

Michael Dean (a big man himself and also a football player) were young boys, they saved their earnings to buy cookies. "We'd buy about a hundred cookies," Michael Dean said. "And he'd give me about five."

The Bears weren't going to let that kind of thing happen. To make sure that Perry watched his weight, they gave him a contract that is unique in professional football. It requires Perry to be weighed two times a week under the watchful eye of the Bears' trainers. If he keeps his weight within the limits set in the contract, he is paid an extra \$100. His stamina and body fat are also measured. If they stay where the Bears want, William Perry gets another \$6000.

But this is not extra money. It is part of a \$108,000 portion of Perry's contract that he must earn by being a weight watcher. He will be paid \$1.4 million, or \$340,000 per year, only if he stays close to the 308 pounds the Bears consider acceptable.

There was trouble from the start. After the draft pick announcement in April, and before the hard work of training would begin in August, Perry couldn't keep his weight down. It crept up on him until he was over 330 pounds, 17 more than he weighed when he had his first press conference.

William Perry had to do something fast.

The contract negotiations were finally settled in August and Perry reported for training. He was already two weeks late.

Perry trained for two days and lost 13 pounds in the heat and humidity of the Bears' camp in Platteville, Wisconsin. But the effort was too great. Muscle cramps set in and he went home.

Defensive Coordinator Ryan, who "hates rookies almost as much as he hates flab," called Perry "Fat Boy" in front of his teammates. He said the new player lacked the technique, knowledge, endurance, and waistline of a professional football player.

When Perry returned to camp he had to watch his teammates tear up their training table of eggs, steak, chicken, lobster, mashed potatoes and gravy, and ice cream and cookies, while he munched on rabbit food, mostly salad, celery, carrots, and a little watermelon.

To protect their investment, the Bears put Perry on a diet that would make a gerbil's stomach growl. "We're trying to change his lifestyle so that he's aware of what food values are," Bears' Team Strength Coordinator Clyde Emrich said.

The Bears' defensive end Tyrone Keys became a friend and unofficial personal trainer to Perry. When Wednesday, weighing-in day, approached and Perry was over the 308 pounds he was supposed to weigh, he would call Keys for help. "Sometimes he'd call at ten o'clock Tuesday night and say, 'Ty, I gotta lose four pounds,'" Keys said. "We'd go to the gym and run and sit in the steam room."

Ditka was going to make Perry a football player on the Bears' terms, not on Perry's. After a

while it started to work. Perry's diet was changed to include a one-egg and cheese omelet with apple juice for breakfast, some bologna on whole wheat bread for lunch, and some fish, fruit, salad, and juice for dinner. Those were hardly like the meals that Inez Perry made for the family, which included a few chickens, loaves of bread, a gallon of milk, and lots more. But if he was going to be a "Monster," he'd have to train like one.

"If getting him lean makes him mean," a popular magazine said about Perry, "opposing offensive linemen just might have their hands full with a very angry household appliance." William Perry was determined to stay within his weight limits. "It took me a while to get used to the new diet," he said, "but I'm going to stick to it." Now when he feels the urge to snack, he chews gum.

Even with his diet under control, the joking about Perry's size continued. After all, he was the most interesting new player to come along in pro football in years. He took the name-calling in stride, even when his coaches did it. "I've been called all these names all my life," Perry said with a good-natured smile. "There isn't anything they can call me that I haven't heard before."

William Perry was a Bear whether or not the players, fans, and coaches all agreed. Now it was up to him to prove it.

CHAPTER VIII

FIRST GAMES

The 1985 season started poorly for the Bears. It was not a good time to be rooting for Chicago. To warm up for the regular season, pro teams play a handful of preseason games. The preseason games don't count in the standings. They do give coaches, fans, and players an idea of what lies ahead.

The Bears' management was already having to defend its selection of The Refrigerator. As the preseason games got underway, it began to look as if they would have to defend the whole team.

The first game was played just four days after Perry showed up for training. The Bears lost to the St. Louis Cardinals in St. Louis, 10 to 3.

The second preseason game was at home. Hometown crowds are supposed to help a team win. They didn't in the game against the Indian-

apolis Colts. The score was a miserable 13 for the Bears, 24 for the Colts.

Game three was closer, but it was still a loss for Chicago. The Cowboys beat them in Dallas, 15 to 13.

When the Bears finally won the last preseason game against the Buffalo Bills 45 to 14, nobody knew if it meant things were turning around, or if they just got lucky.

Things weren't turning around. They had already turned. Beginning on September 8, the Bears would play 16 regular season games. After that, if their record earned them a spot in the play-offs, they would play two more. If they won the play-offs, they would go to the Superbowl on January 26.

That would total 19 games.

The Bears would win all but one.

The Superbowl clock began to tick.

The Bears put away the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 38 to 28. A week later the New England Patriots fell, 20 to 7. The Minnesota Vikings went down 33 to 24 just four days later. The Washington Redskins' turn came on the last Sunday in September. They were flattened, 45 to 10.

The Bears were on a roll, and they were doing it without their famous but untested rookie. William Perry had covered for a kickoff against the Redskins. He had crunched the ball carrier. But that was hardly worth a million dollars. His jersey, number 72, was still as fresh as when it came out of the box.

The Buccaneers took another shellacking, 27 to 19, followed by a worse drubbing of the San Francisco 49ers, 26 to 10.

It was the 49er game that reintroduced William Perry to the sports limelight. His selection by the Bears hadn't exactly been forgotten, but in a game that is played every Sunday—and sometimes on Monday—what counts is what happened last. And for Perry, nothing had happened for a while.

Then came the "Refrigerator Play." It was Mike Ditka's revenge for the "Angus Play" that had humiliated his Bears a season earlier.

William Perry lined up in the backfield. McMahon called the signals. The ball got buried in Perry's chest, and he popped through the 49er line like a cannonball through butter.

The press and the fans took notice. The million-dollar rookie was a football player. He was different, but he could play football.

Then came the first Green Bay Packers game. The rivalry between Green Bay and Chicago was well known. The Bears had always been known as independent players. There was no love lost among them. Hawg Hanner, a Green Bay tackle 20 years earlier, summed it up: "The Bears all hate each other," he said. "But they hate us a lot more."

Perry's limelight turned into a spotlight in the Packers game. The Bears were comfortably ahead when "The Fridge" trotted onto the field. The shock of the huge defensive lineman playing

on the offensive team had worn off some, but fans suspected something was up.

There was indeed. Two times Perry paired up against Packer defenseman George Cumby. Both times Cumby went down. Like the kids back at Aiken High School, Cumby may have wished he could have skipped the game.

Then came The Refrigerator's first real moment of glory. With the football lost somewhere in his huge hands, Perry rumbled through the Packer line like a walk-in cooler on wheels for a touchdown! His memorable spike flashed on TV screens across the nation. The fun was back in football and its name was William Perry!

The game ended in a lopsided 23 to 7 victory for the Bears.

The second meeting of the regular season against the Vikings gave Perry the chance to do what he was hired to do. The Refrigerator plunged through the Viking line and sacked quarterback Tommy Kramer. "I came here to sack quarterbacks," he said. "Not to score touchdowns."

Mike Ditka agreed. "That's what we drafted him for," he added.

But scoring touchdowns can be habit-forming, as Perry learned. In the next contest with the Green Bay Packers, The Refrigerator played in the starting lineup for the first time. He was a defensive tackle. But now the coaches knew he could play offense, too. He moved gingerly on his powerful legs, stepped out of reach of a defending

linebacker, and caught a short pass and scored. The game ended 16 to 10 with the Bears on top again. Winning was also becoming a habit.

Enthusiasm for The Refrigerator was running as high as his own excitement playing the game. He was still being ridiculed, but fewer of the jokes were at his expense. When they were, he simply shrugged and said they were "just to motivate me."

Motivation may have been his excuse in a memorable play against the Dallas Cowboys. Walter Payton, the player most mentioned as the greatest running back of all time, was cut off at the line of scrimmage, not far from the goal line. Although the Bears would win the game by an overwhelming score, Perry sensed the need for a new kind of touchdown. He picked up his teammate. He paid no attention to the pile of Cowboys and Bears flopped at his feet. Raising Payton into the air, he tossed the startled man and ball over the goal line.

The play was illegal, of course, and Perry was penalized. But the last shadow of doubt about the The Refrigerator's unique kind of football vanished like a puff of smoke.

The Cowboys received the worst beating in their history, 44 to 0. And with the win, the Bears took the NFC Central Division championship for the second year in a row. There was little doubt where the Bears would end up. But there were still a few games to go.

The Atlanta Falcons fell 36 to 0. Bear confi-

dence was at its peak. The streak, 12 in a row, plus a preseason game, was shattered. The Dolphins, playing in front of a hometown audience, tripped up the Bears 38 to 24.

The Superbowl was barely more than a month and a half away.

The clash on December 8 with the Indianapolis Colts restored some Bears' confidence. But the score was a dangerously close 17 to 10. Things improved a week later when they beat the New York Jets 19 to 6. By the final game of the regular season on Sunday, December 22, against the Detroit Lions, the 37 to 17 score felt even better. In that game Perry snapped up a fumble and ran a 59-yard recovery return before being brought down.

Time magazine had said William Perry was the most well-rounded man on the team. A 310-pound man in a full defenseman's uniform who can run over half the length of a football field and has to be stopped by a tackle and not a heart attack is something to see!

Next would come the play-offs that would determine who would be in the twentieth Superbowl game of football history.

The Bears looked mighty good. And William Perry, starting under a cloud of doubt as a rookie in the hardest-hitting sport of all, had earned his stripes. He had also earned the respect of his teammates, his coaches, and football fans around the world.

But William Perry is not the only Bear any

more than the Bears are the only team in professional football. And the "Magical Season" of 1985 was not the result of any single player's actions.

The Chicago Bears is a unique team. Its players are also extraordinary. Each one brings a special talent to the game. And sometimes a special nuttiness. A look at some of the "Monsters of the Midway" tells why this team from the Windy City has been called the #1 defensive team of all time and a "point machine," or that facing them is like "being on the freeway at rush hour without a car."

Consider Mark Bortz. He's six feet six inches tall and weighs 269 pounds with arms so big they call him "Bortzilla."

Otis Wilson, the linebacker, says he's in the game to "knock out the quarterback." Otis wonders if that's the reason the pros don't vote for him to play in the Pro Bowl.

Mike Singletary, Number 50, has been a serious student of football since he was a kid. Now he's the Bears' most valuable defensive player and maybe the best player in the NFL. "Growing up, I remember watching the Bears on TV. It was great," he says.

Number 34, Walter Payton, has played in the NFL for 10 years and is the leading runner of all time. His nickname is "Sweetness," but being sweet isn't why he's acclaimed as the best all-around player in football history.

Tyrone Keys, the six foot seven inch defensive end who is William Perry's friend and helps "the Fridge" keep his weight down, has missed only

four games out of the 47 the Bears have played since he joined them four years ago.

Defensive tackle Steve "Ming the Merciless" McMichael once accepted a pin from a politician visiting the Bears' locker room. As evidence of how tough the Bears are, McMichael thanked the man for the pin and then stuck it into his own bare chest. When he's not playing football, he hunts rattlesnakes.

Dan "Danimal" Hampton has played for the Bears for seven years as the anchor of the defensive line.

Former Yale football star Gary Fencik plays free safety. He's number two on the all time Bears' interception list with 35 to his credit. In just one game he made 12 tackles. To keep up his Bears image he runs with the bulls in Spain.

Punk rock quarterback Jim McMahon's hero is Joe Namath. Even his teammates think he's a nut behind his wrap-around sunglasses and clipped hair. But until he came along, the Bears didn't build their offense around the quarterback. They do now. Even if it means a bout of head bashing after a big play.

There's also Willie Gault, Tom Thayer, Keith Ortego, Calvin Thomas, Mike Tomczak, Richard Dent, Reggie Phillips, Mike Hartenstine, Jim Morrissey, Kevin Butler, Jay Hilgenberg, and a list that includes over 50 of professional football's outstanding champions.

CHAPTER IX

BEYOND SUPERBOWL

The Bears' two postseason games were run-aways. The New York Giants went down 21 to zip on January 5. A week later the L.A. Rams vanished down the same empty hole, 24 to nothing. That left the Bears one more game to go, Superbowl XX.

Meanwhile, the New England Patriots had earned their own slot in the world championship of professional football. The game was scheduled for January 26, 1986 in New Orleans.

The first meeting of the Bears and Patriots early in the season ended in a Bear walkaway, 20 to 7. But that was also early in the Patriots' head coach Raymond Berry's career with the Boston team. Back then, when he was new, Berry had to work with a team that had been disillusioned by their coaching.

The Patriots who headed for the Superbowl were a new team. Berry wanted his players "to come out like tigers," ten-year Patriot center veteran Pete Brock said. That and knowing that the Bears couldn't be pounded led to a strategy that would rely on a razzle-dazzle attack.

The Patriots were wary of the Monsters of the Midway. One Monster in particular held their attention. "There is no defensive player in his right mind who would tackle William Perry," the Oakland Raiders' cornerback Lester Hayes had once said.

The Bears-Patriots first game had ended in a one-sided 20 to 7 defeat for the Patriots. To the chagrin of 73,000 fans in the stadium in New Orleans and millions of fans watching on television around the world, the second game was also a bust. The Bears won handily, 46 to 10. They were, without question, the world champions of professional football.

The Bears had been in the intense glare of fame before. But William Perry was new to the attention he'd been receiving since his surprise first-round draft selection. "Fridge Fever" was sweeping the nation. His exploits on and off the field delighted almost everyone. Jokes about him continued to be made, but his always pleasant personality brushed them aside.

"Everybody has something smart to say," he said. "But as long as nobody comes up and slaps me in the face, I don't feel no real grief. I've always thought that if you're different, it's up to

you to make friends with the other guy. My sense of humor can carry me. I laugh along."

It's hard not to like a man with an attitude like that. William Perry is a delightfully warm and humble man with a talent and heart as big as he is.

Just what has his sudden rise to fame meant to William Perry? And where will it end? Those are questions that are difficult to answer. *Time* magazine said about Perry, "He is the least accomplished member of the defense, the least essential attachment to the offense, the most famous football player in the world." *People* magazine said Perry has "put the fun back in football." And William Perry himself says "Hey! Nobody knew this was gonna happen. Not me. Not you. Not anybody."

William Perry has become the best-known football player, TV salesman ever. While O.J. Simpson still has to run through airports to catch planes, Perry appears on talk shows as a guest of David Letterman and Johnny Carson, passes a table full of Big Macs—and the table—to wide-eyed hamburger freaks at McDonald's, makes rock videos with his friend and teammate Walter "Sweetness" Payton, and washes down Kraft dinners with plenty of Coca-Cola. And, of course, he also sells refrigerators.

The rookie with the gap-toothed smile earns over twice his \$340,000-a-year salary as a Bear because he makes TV commercials and personal appearances.

That much publicity, money, and fame often destroys people. It can turn them into monsters of another kind. What has being famous done to "The Fridge"? His own words describe it best:

"I'm just as I am . . . everything has been a thrill to me. The whole season. It's funny to see me doing TV commercials. My wife and I sometimes look over at each other and just laugh. One day somebody won't ask you for your autograph. You won't be on TV, and that'll be okay too."

William Perry is still the most famous Bear of all. But he will have to continue to earn his place in the sun alongside his teammates. There is still some doubt about his basic playing ability. His weight is a constant concern.

He and Sherry have two children. They live in a house in a suburb of Chicago. "Lots of room for a growing family," Perry says.

As chairman of the board of William Perry, Inc., "Fridge-a-Bear," as Sherry calls him, and his family will never be poor. Their future is secure. But what binds it all together is not money or fame. It is the outspoken warmth of the man in the center of a professional football hurricane, the player they call The Refrigerator.

"What goes up must come down. And everything will come back to reality. And I'll still be just like I am right now. I haven't changed a bit since Day One."

—William Perry



Surprise! William "The Refrigerator" Perry prepares to cut a refrigerator-shaped cake at a surprise birthday party given for him. (AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS)

AN UNAUTHORIZED EDITION

At first, the selection of William Perry as a Chicago Bears first draft choice surprised the world of professional football. But it didn't take long for this over-300-pound player to endear himself to teammates and fans alike.

How did "The Refrigerator" make his meteoric rise to football superstardom? How did coach Mike Ditka's unusual strategy to place a defensive tackle as an offensive player payoff?

To find out, read all about William Perry and The Chicago Bears in this fact-filled, illustrated book. Highlights include: the illustrious deeds of Perry and his knock'em dead teammates Payton, McMahon and the rest!

Book Number: 10430
ISBN Number: 0-87449-180-8

MODERN PUBLISHING
A Division of Unisystems, Inc.
New York, New York 10022

Printed in Canada